

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 254114

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MASS, TC

SUBJECT: ABU DHABI REQUEST FOR TOW MISSILES

REF: ABU DHABI 2007

FOR AMBASSADOR FROM UNDER SECRETARY SISCO

1. YOU HAVE MADE A STRONG CASE FOR THE SALE OF TOWS TO ABU DHABI DEFENSE FORCE BUT AFTER A GOOD DEAL OF REFLECTION, WE HAVE COME TO CONCLUSION THAT THERE ARE GOOD AND COMPELLING REASONS TO DISAPPROVE BOTH RELEASE OF TOWS AND SENDING AN EXPERT TO ABU DHABI TO DISCUSS ISSUE AT THIS TIME:

(A) BASIC REASON FOR THIS DECISION IS THAT TOW SYSTEM BEARS NO PLAUSIBLE RELATIONSHIP TO ANY THREAT WHICH ABU DHABI, OR UAE FOR THAT MATTER, MIGHT CONCEIVABLY FACE. ONLY ARMOR WITHIN FEASIBLE STRIKING RANGE OF ABU DHABI TO OUR KNOWLEDGE IS SMALL NUMBER OF ARMORED CARS IN DUBAI
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DEFENSE FORCE AND UNION DEFENSE FORCE AND THAT IS HARDLY

THE KIND OF THREAT WE WANT TO BUILD UP ADDF TO DEFEND IT-
SELF AGAINST.

(B) OUR VARIOUS NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES ON ARMS SALES IN

LOWER GULF STATES, CARRIED OUT IN EARLY SEVENTIES AND RELATED TO WITHDRAWAL OF PROTECTIVE BRITISH PRESENCE, PRODUCED CONCLUSION THAT WE SHOULD SELL EQUIPMENT WHICH ENHANCED INTERNAL SECURITY CAPABILITY OF SMALL STATES BUT WHICH WOULD NOT WHET APPETITES OF OTHER LOWER GULF STATES (OR IN CASE OF UAE APPETITES OF ARMED FORCES OF OTHER EMIRATES), AND WHICH COULD BE DESTABILIZING. WE THINK THIS POLICY HAS STOOD THE TEST OF TIME WELL. WE HAVE MADE ONLY ONE SALE WHICH MIGHT BE CONSTRUED AS AN EXCEPTION TO THAT POLICY: WE AGREED TO SALE OF A SMALL NUMBER OF TOWS TO OMAN BECAUSE IT IS ENGAGED IN A WAR AGAINST AN ENEMY SUPPORTED BY PDRY AND PDRY COULD CONCEIVABLY, IF DHOFAR REBELS WERE PRESSED TO POINT OF NEAR EXTINCTION, THROW SOVIET SUPPLIED ARMOR INTO DIRECT ACTION AGAINST OMAN.

(C) WE HAVE HAD AMPLE OPPORTUNITY IN RECENT WEEKS TO SAMPLE THE CONGRESSIONAL MOOD ON ARMS SALES IN REGION. IT IS NOT RECEPTIVE. EACH CASE OF SIGNIFICANCE HAS HAD, OR WILL HAVE, TO BE ARGUED IN DETAIL ON ITS MERITS. TO ARGUE THAT SALE OF TOWS WILL GAIN US SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL ADVANTAGES IN UAE IS SIMPLY NOT PERSUASIVE ON THE HILL. ARGUMENTS HAVING TO DO WITH PREVIOUS SALES OF WEAPONS TO OTHER NATIONS IN THE AREA ARE PROBABLY EQUALLY NON-PERSUASIVE; THEY MAY WELL BE INTERPRETED BY SOME IN CONGRESS AS EVIDENCE OF PAST IRRESPONSIBILITY IN ARMS SALES RATHER THAN AS A RATIONALE FOR FUTURE ACTIONS.

2. IN REACHING THIS CONCLUSION, WE HAVE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT THE LARGER POLITICAL FRAMEWORK IN WHICH YOU HAVE PLACED THIS REQUEST AND WE ARE OF COURSE PLEASED THAT SHAIKH ZAYID HAS MADE THIS GESTURE TOWARD US. CONSISTENT WITH WHAT YOU WERE TOLD HERE, WE HAVE ALSO TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT THAT GIVEN THE PATTERN OF US ARMS SALES IN REGION, WE CANNOT OVER THE LONG TERM HOPE TO PURSUE OUR INTERESTS SUCCESSFULLY IN ABU DHABI WITHOUT BEING RESPONSIVE IN SOME
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REALISTIC MEASURE TO REQUESTS FOR US ARMS. BUT IT SEEMS TO US THAT OUR POLITICAL RELATIONS CAN ONLY BE STRENGTHENED BY OUR RESPONDING TO THIS REQUEST WITH UTMOST FORTHRIGHTNESS AND POINTING OUT TO ZAYID THAT HE HAS SIMPLY PICKED THE WRONG SYMBOL FOR HIS GESTURE. WHILE OUR DISAPPROVAL OF THIS SALE MAY MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR US TO DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP IN THIS SENSITIVE AREA WITH ABU DHABI, OUR CONCURRENCE, FOLLOWED BY CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

AGAINST IT, WOULD DO FAR MORE TO DAMAGE US-UAE BILATERAL RELATIONS AND IT COULD HURT OUR CREDIBILITY WITH CONGRESS IN CASES WHICH WE BELIEVE TO BE JUSTIFIABLE.

3. IN PRESENTING OUR DECISION TO ADG, YOU SHOULD MAKE A MAXIMUM EFFORT TO SEPARATE OUR GENERAL POLICY FROM THE

OUTCOME OF THIS PARTICULAR CASE. WE DO WISH TO BE HELPFUL TO ABU DHABI IN MEETING ITS LEGITIMATE DEFENSE NEEDS, BUT AN HONEST RELATIONSHIP IS ESSENTIAL IN THIS FIELD AS IN OTHERS. IT WOULD NOT HELP ABU DHABI FOR US TO GO ALONG WITH A REQUEST FOR A WEAPON SUCH AS TOW, WHICH IS UNRELATED TO THEIR REAL NEEDS AND ON WHICH THEY ARE ADMITTEDLY NOT WELL-INFORMED THEMSELVES; ON THE CONTRARY, IT WOULD, IN THE LONG RUN, HAVE A DESTRUCTIVE EFFECT AS IT BECAME CLEAR TO ADDF JUST HOW USELESS TOW WOULD BE IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT. PART OF THE REASON FOR THE SUCCESS OF OUR MILITARY SUPPLY AND TRAINING PROGRAMS IN SAUDI ARABIA, FOR EXAMPLE, IS THAT WE HAVE TRIED TO TELL THE SAUDIS THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT WE THOUGHT THEY NEEDED, AND WHAT WAS SUPERFLUOUS OR UNWORKABLE. THE RESULT HAS BEEN THAT ALTHOUGH THE SAUDIS DO NOT ALWAYS LIKE WHAT THEY HEAR, THEY KEEP COMING BACK FOR MORE BECAUSE OUR APPROACH HAS FOSTERED A RELATIONSHIP OF FRANKNESS AND HONESTY, AND THE SAUDIS RESPECT THAT. IT IS ULTIMATELY ONLY ON THAT BASIS THAT WE CAN FOSTER A COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP IN THE MILITARY FIELD, AND I HOPE THAT WHATEVER ABU DHABI GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS YOU DISCUSS THIS WITH CAN BE PERSUADED OF THE VALIDITY OF THAT APPROACH. KISSINGER

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